



# *Iowa Outdoors*

Iowa Department of Natural Resources  
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**Jan. 11, 2005**

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Eleventh Hour Snowfall Provides Spectacular Finale

## **IOWA PHEASANT SEASON ENDS WITH A BANG**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE---Jonathan Conder is my hero. He's also the local, Channel-3 TV weatherman. I elevated him to hero status the moment I heard him predict the arrival of a major winter storm system that was likely to drop several inches snow before moving on.

Most of the people I talked to failed to see the humor. To me, it was blatantly obvious that those folks were not serious pheasant hunters. But for those of us who do pursue the wily ring-neck, Conder's forecast was cause for celebration.

The clock was rapidly ticking down on this year's pheasant season. With less than a full week to go, Iowa bird hunters needed a dramatic change in conditions.

Although statewide pheasant numbers are down from last year's decade-high counts, the 2004 season has proven to be at least average -- perhaps a bit better. The crops stayed in the field a little later than usual last fall. For hunters, the slowed harvest translated into a prolonged supply of new [highly naive] birds as cornfields slowly disappeared one by one.

But by the time the Christmas holidays rolled around, hunter numbers were tailing off dramatically in spite of the fact that plenty of birds still remained in the covers. By now the situation had become crystal clear. After enduring a solid two months of hunting pressure, local roosters knew the score. With few exceptions, they had become smarter than the humans chasing them.

In essence, rooster pheasants can be divided into two distinct categories. Those that fly and those that run. The majority of those birds that did what we think pheasants are supposed to do -- which is sit tight and then flush on cue from under the tip of your well trained dog's nose -- were likely introduced to a roasting pan during the first week or so of the hunting season.

Those birds that are still around have become different creatures indeed. Crafty beyond comprehension, these roosters have earned their graduate degrees in survival. These late season birds can be depended upon to do anything and everything that we think pheasants are not supposed to do. They sneak, run, crawl, and slither. About the only thing these birds won't do is fly. No matter. Those that do usually go airborne a couple of hundred yards out of range anyway. The frustration level is enough to make a good hunting dog bite its own tail.

Only one thing can master these crafty, late season ring-necks. That ingredient is snow and plenty of it. Beginning late last Tuesday, those snows [the very ones that Conder had promised] finally arrived in the state. By late Wednesday, it was beginning to look a lot like winter. By Thursday, pheasant hunting enthusiasts were cracking under the strain of anticipation. Those who could pull it off took half-day vacations, while others settled for a short hunt during a long noon hour.

Most hunters knew, of course, that the newly arrived snowfall would improve success. Fewer were prepared for the spectacular, five-day, no holds barred pheasant fest that concluded when this year's season ended on Monday afternoon.

Last week's storm was significant for two reasons. First of all, it dropped plenty of snow. In the areas I hunt in extreme northern Iowa, everyone got at least six or seven inches of the white stuff. Many areas of the state received even more. Even more important was that the snow was light and dry.

Like everything else trying to get around in powder snow, rooster pheasants sink right to the bottom. Those conditions are great for roosting, but when your legs are only about six inches long, sprinting through grassy covers or running down fencerows becomes a sudden impossibility. The best option now is to simply sit tight and hope hunters will pass you by. In other words, even the cagiest old birds were once again doing exactly what pheasants are supposed to do.

As so very rarely happens in the world of pheasant hunting, the ending week of this year's season was actually better than the first. With roosters dug deep beneath the covers of cattail and canary grass, point blank flushes became the norm. Also, with several inches of snow now covering the landscape there were fewer places for birds to be, which immediately resulted in the best concentrations of the season.

Whether a hunter spent the final days of this year's season following the straight lines of a brushy fencerow or meandering through a favorite stand of cattails, one theme

remained constant. Everyone encountered plenty of pheasants, most managed to bag some roosters, and a lot of folks took home three bird limits.

It was a season finale that pheasant hunters often dream about, but rarely get. It was enough to make a good hunting dog wag its tail.

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## **NEW LAW AIMS TO PROTECT IOWA LAKES AND RIVERS**

BOONE - Iowa's water resources are under threat by non-native species, many which are used in ornamental water gardens, as bait or are kept as exotic pets. Snakeheads, silver carp, Eurasian watermilfoil and zebra mussels can cause ecological and economic harm to Iowa waters by out competing native plants and animals and can interfere with water based recreation.

A new law, which takes effect Jan. 12, will hopefully prevent the introduction and spread of these aquatic invasive species in Iowa, said Kim Bogenschutz, aquatic nuisance species coordinator for the DNR.

These species are spread mainly by attaching to boats and other equipment used in different waters. Preventing this spread is as simple as inspecting your boat and removing any visible plants, animals or mud; draining water from the boat, motor and live well; and dumping unwanted bait in a trash can and not in the lake.

Snakeheads, purple loosestrife and other pet and water garden species are also spread by being intentionally released into public waters. "This is not only illegal, but it can cause negative impacts to our lakes and rivers," Bogenschutz said.

Snakeheads are also listed as a federal injurious species. Since October 2002, it has been illegal to import these fish into the United States or to transport them between states. Beginning Jan. 12, it is no longer legal to possess snakeheads in Iowa.

"If you have a snakehead, it is important to not release it live into the wild," she said. "You can properly dispose of these fish by contacting a veterinarian or pet retailer for guidance about humane disposal."

The new law lists the invasive species that are illegal to possess, introduce, purchase, sell or transport in Iowa. The exception is when the species is being removed from watercraft and equipment, is caught and immediately killed or returned to the water from which it came, is being transported in a sealed container for identification purposes, or is lawfully acquired dead. It is also illegal to introduce any live fish, except for hooked bait, into public waters.

For more information, contact Bogenschutz at 515-432-2823.

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## ***IOWA FISHING REPORT***

**For the week of January 11, 2005**

**[www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com)**

Ice fishing reports will be released every week while quality ice conditions exist.

### **Northwest**

**Spirit Lake** (Dickinson): Walleye fishing has been fair early in the morning and late in the evening. Some nice fish are being caught off the north end, at Buffalo Run and the rock pile in 15 to 18 feet of water on the east side. Use jigging raps and kastmasters tipped with minnows or minnow heads. A few yellow perch are being caught off Buffalo Run, Reeds Run and the north end. A lot of sorting is required for larger fish. A few crappies are being caught in Templar Lagoon and at the North Grade using wax worms and teardrops. Anglers are also catching a few bluegills at the North Grade on wax worms and teardrops.

**West Lake Okoboji** (Dickinson): A few yellow perch are being caught in Emerson Bay, Smith's Bay and Miller's Bay on wax worms and teardrops. The walleye bite has been fair in Smith's bay late in the evening. A few bluegills are being caught in Emerson, Smith's and Miller's bays using wax worms and teardrops.

**Silver Lake** (Dickinson): Walleye fishing has been excellent around the south boat ramp.

**Lake Pahoja** (Lyon): Lots of small bluegill and crappie are being caught around the brush piles.

**Black Hawk Lake** (Sac): Yellow bass and crappie fishing is fair on live minnows, and jigging spoons tipped with minnow heads.

**Arrowhead Lake** (Sac): Fishing is fair for 7 to 8-inch bluegills around structure.

**Yellow Smoke** (Crawford): Fishing is good for 8 to 9-inch bluegills on teardrops and wax worms. The lake is drawn down 8 feet.

**Brushy Creek** (Webster): A few walleyes have been hitting on minnows. A few bluegills have been caught on wax worms. The lake is completely covered by snow. Ice on the main lake remains unsafe.

**Clear Lake** (Cerro Gordo): Walleye fishing is good. Jigging spoons and minnows are both producing fish. Sunrise and sunset times are the best times to fish. Remember the 14-inch minimum length limit. Yellow bass are being caught northeast of the Island, Farmer's Beach and Billy's Reef. Small spoons and minnows are producing the best. White bass are being caught in the same areas as the yellow bass.

**Indian Lake**, Eldred Sherwood Park (Hancock): Bluegills are biting small jigs tipped with wax worms.

**Upper Pine Lake** (Hardin): Bluegill fishing is good on wax worms and small jigs.

**Smith Lake** (Kossuth): Bluegills are hitting on small jigs and wax worms. Sorting is required, but 6 to 8-inch fish are available.

**Lake Catherine** (Winnebago): Bluegills are being caught on small jigs and wax worms. Most fish are between 6 to 8 inches. Late afternoon is the best time to fish.

**Silver Lake** (Worth): Yellow perch fishing is good around the jetty and the campground area using minnows. Sorting is required, but 7 to 9-inch fish are available.

**For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.**

### **Southwest**

Ice conditions in most areas have been reported as good, but check the ice often because some areas have weaker ice. Ice conditions vary from 6 inches on the farm ponds to 4 inches on small lakes. It is strongly advised to remain cautious.

**Don Williams** (Boone): Bluegill and crappie fishing is reported to be fair to good around cedar trees south of the ramp in the main lake. Jigs and wax worms are being used for bluegill and jigs and minnows are preferred for crappie.

**Big Creek** (Polk): Bluegill fishing is reported to be good during the day using teardrops and wax worms in the Lost Lake area near the spillway. Crappie fishing has been good late in the day in the Lost Lake area using rocker jigs and minnows.

**Lake Ahquabi** (Warren): Bluegill and redear fishing has been fair to good using jigs or hooks with worms and wax worms.

**Hooper Lake** (Warren): Bluegill fishing has been fair using wax worms and jigs.

**Banner Lake** (Warren): Trout fishing has improved recently.

**Hickory Grove** (Story): Bluegill fishing is fair to good using small jigs/hooks and wax worms. The better fishing areas have been around structure, trees and/or pallets.

**Easter Lake** (Polk): Bluegill fishing has been good with jigs and wax worms, although a number of smaller fish are being caught. Crappie fishing has been fair with jigs and minnows.

**Mormon Trail** (Adair): Excellent for bluegills of all sizes. Crappies are fair tipping jig with minnow.

**Littlefield** (Audubon): Bluegill and crappie fishing is fair on wax worms. Ice conditions are 7 to 9 inches.

**Nodaway** (Adair): Bluegills are slow, but are averaging 7 to 8 inches. Crappies are fair using minnows in late afternoon.

**Orient** (Adair): Crappies are good jigging minnows in 8 to 10 feet of water.

**DeSoto** (Harrison): Crappie fishing is good using minnows around structure late in the afternoon. Bluegills are being caught, but most are small.

**Willow** (Harrison): Ice fishing is just getting started. The ice is about 7 inches thick. Bluegills in the 7 to 8-inch range are being caught using wax worms. Crappies are slow, but some are being caught in the evening using minnows.

**Viking** (Montgomery): Bluegill fishing is good using teardrops and wax worms around structure. Crappies are fair using minnows in early morning and late afternoon. Anglers are catching 5 to 7-inch yellow bass on jigs tipped with minnows.

**Prairie Rose** (Shelby): Small bluegills are being caught with jigs and teardrops tipped with wax worms. Crappie fishing is excellent for 7-inch fish around structure in 8 to 10 feet of water.

**Southwest Iowa Farm Ponds:** The best fishing reports have been from privately owned small ponds for bluegill, and in the larger ponds, crappie, using teardrops tipped with wax worm. Ice thickness varies from 6 to 9 inches.

**Most of the lakes in Decatur, Ringgold, and Taylor** counties still have marginal quality ice conditions and patches of open water.

**Three Mile** (Union): Reports NO fishing activity this past week with only 3 to 5 inches of marginal ice and some open water areas.

**Fogle** (Ringgold): No fishing activity with only 2 inches of ice.

**Farm ponds in these lower counties** report 3 inches of ice with about 3 inches of snow cover. Check ice quality frequently.

**For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.**

### **Southeast**

**Mississippi River Pools 16 – 19:** Although anglers may be able to get on a few backwaters, ice conditions are currently not favorable and ice fishing is not recommended.

**Lake Odessa** (Louisa): Unsafe ice. Some open water along the edges.

**Lake Darling** (Washington): Unsafe ice. The lake opened up in the middle last Thursday. Very thin ice around the edges.

**Lake Geode** (Henry): Open water.

**Lake Belva Deer** (Keokuk): Unsafe ice conditions. Ice thickness is 1 to 2 inches out from the edges. The area by the dam opened up last Thursday.

**Lake Rathbun** (Appanoose): The main lake has areas of open water. Some fishing is occurring in the bays and sheltered coves on 3 to 4 inches of ice. Anglers have been catching crappies suspended near brush piles in the Honey Creek area. Ice thickness is extremely variable so use caution.

**Lake Miami** (Monroe): Ice conditions are not favorable to support anglers.

**Lake Sugema** (Van Buren): Ice conditions are not favorable to support anglers.

**Lake Macbride** (Johnson): Ice conditions are variable, with 4 to 6 inches of ice being reported. Anglers have reported slow fishing but some bluegills and a few crappies have been taken on small jigs tipped with wax worms. Deeper brush piles have been producing best.

**Pleasant Creek** (Linn): Anglers are catching some perch on small jigs/spoons tipped with wax worms. Ice conditions remain variable and caution should be used.

**Hannen Lake** (Benton): Ice conditions have improved to nearly 8 inches. Bluegills and crappies are both being caught, mainly near the dam and out in front of the shop.

**Kent Park** (Johnson): Use caution. Anglers are fishing, but ice conditions are variable.

**Diamond Lake** (Poweshiek): Ice conditions are poor.

**Farm ponds:** Unsafe ice. Most ponds have lost ice around the edges.

**For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.**

### **Northeast**

**Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15:** Good ice conditions continue on **Pools 9 to 11** with most areas having 6 to 8 inches. Anglers still need to be cautious, especially near the shoreline or in areas where current may exist. Melting snow in these areas can weaken the ice. Crappie and bluegill fishing has slowed a bit over the past week in many areas. Anglers are beginning to report increased catches of yellow perch in **Pools 9 and 10**. In **Pool 10**, anglers are reporting better fishing in Joyce Lake, with slower fishing near Noble's Island. Bussey Lake (**Pool 10**) continues to be slow for crappie, but a few nice bluegills are being caught. Anglers are also reporting good tip-up fishing for northern pike and bass in backwater areas near **Lock and Dam 9** near Harpers Ferry (**Pool 10**). Walleye and sauger in the tailwater areas of **Pool 10** has slowed, but anglers are still catching fish. Boat anglers can still access the tailwater area at Guttenberg by using the new boat ramp at the DNR office; however, this ramp may ice in later this week. Ice conditions in **Pool 12** have improved; however, fishing has slowed. Fish Trap and Kehoe Lake (**Pool 12**) are fair for bluegills and crappie. In **Pools 13 to 15**, ice conditions are variable. Please use extreme caution when accessing these areas.

**Lake Hendricks** (Howard): Bluegill fishing is excellent with some fish in the 8 to 10-inch range. Fish during the morning hours near the point in 7 to 10 feet of water for best results. An occasional nice crappie is also being taken.

**Volga Lake** (Fayette): Crappie fishing is fair with best results in the deeper water near the dam.

**Brinker Lake** [East Lake] (Black Hawk): Crappie fishing is good during the late evening hours close to the Hwy. 218 bridge.

**Fisher Lake** (Black Hawk): Bluegill fishing is good. The fish bite best during the last hour of daylight.

**Heritage Pond** (Dubuque): Rainbow trout will be stocked into Heritage Pond on Jan.15, weather permitting. Anglers are reminded to purchase their 2005 trout fees. Many of the trout streams are open and fishable throughout the winter months.

**For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-926-3276.**

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